



HOW TO...

Shoot sequentially

Sometimes it's advisable to take one thing at a time when it comes to digital photography, as **Mike Bedford** demonstrates with his time-lapse tutorial

Shooting sequences of photographs is an expensive business with a film camera. First you have to buy a motor drive. Second you have to remember that, with the faster drives, it could cost you a couple of pounds a second to keep your finger on the shutter release. Third, you could use up a whole film in just six seconds.

Most digital cameras can shoot sequentially without an accessory and the running cost isn't an issue. But sequential shooting doesn't have to mean fast shooting; you can leave seconds, minutes or even hours between shots. Here we provide some tips on how to shoot sequentially and show you how to create time-lapse movies.

SEQUENTIAL MODE

Using your camera's sequential or burst mode seems simple enough: pick the appropriate menu entry and hold your finger on the shutter release until you've got enough shots in the can. In reality things are not so easy. Your camera might have two or more sequential modes. In one mode it focuses and takes a light meter reading before the first shot and uses the same settings for all the shots. In other modes it might adjust the focusing and/or exposure between every shot. This comes at the expense of speed and often one shot per second is the limit. In most cases, though, the lighting won't change substantially between shots and, unless you're shooting something moving toward you very quickly, the focus can remain fixed too.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that sequential mode is fast, though, even with fixed focus and aperture. Whereas six frames per second

(fps) wasn't an uncommon speed for a motor drive on a film SLR, few digital cameras go beyond 2.5fps. At this speed you could easily miss that important moment. If you really need a sequence – say of a long jumper in action – by all means use burst mode. But if you're using it in the hope of capturing a single shot, you may do better manually, as long as your camera responds quickly.

TIME-LAPSE PHOTOGRAPHY

Just as fast-moving subjects are suitable for sequential photography, so are things that move slowly. You could capture sequences showing a flower opening, clouds moving across the sky, or the hourly or seasonal changes in a landscape. Sequences such as these can be assembled into a time-lapse movie. Windows Movie Maker allows you to include still photos in a movie but, if you want more flexibility, packages such as MovieSalsa (see www.imagesalsa.com/moviesalsa) are geared specifically towards time-lapse movie making.

Assembling your sequence into a movie might be simple enough, but taking the shots in the first place can be tricky. Most importantly the camera must not be allowed to move between shots, so a tripod is essential. If you have a camera with specific support for time-lapse photography, program it to take a sequence of shots at your chosen interval. If not, you might be able to get software that allows your PC to control your camera via its USB port, triggering a shot at regular intervals, and even storing the image directly to disk. Go to www.steves-digicams.com/digsoftware_cameractrl.html for a list of available software.

If neither of these options is possible, you'll have to take each shot manually. If your camera has a remote control unit, use that to reduce camera movement. Otherwise, be very careful when you press the shutter release and use as sturdy a tripod as possible at its lowest extension. If you're working manually, with shots separated by more than a couple of minutes, make sure you use an alarm clock so you don't miss one.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Perhaps the biggest challenge is when you want to leave long periods between shots. If you're shooting the changes in a landscape over the course of a year, it's not feasible to leave your camera set up on its tripod. You can accept that there will be slight changes between shots, take a slightly wider angle shot than you really need and crop the photos so they match up. In some instances there may be no alternative, but this does involve a lot of extra work and the results probably won't be perfect.

For the best results, you'll need to employ a bit of ingenuity and build some sort of camera support that has less flexibility than a tripod. A tripod pans and tilts, which means you'll never set it up in exactly the same way twice, even if you manage to put it on the same spot. But if you knock up a wooden box, into which your camera can slide in and out but is a tight fit, and screw that box to an immovable object, you'll be sure that each shot is taken from exactly the same position. Needless to say, this is a practical proposition if you're happy to shoot from your own garden, somewhat less so if the scene you have in mind is in a town centre. **CS**

Time travel: sequential shooting over a long period



A scene can change dramatically in just a few hours. These two shots were taken about four hours apart and they could form part of an interesting sequence of stills. However, for use in a time-lapse movie, far better registration between the shots would be needed